

## Writing Clear Directions for Educational Assessments

The directions for a true and false quiz are rather straightforward. Put your name on the paper; write T for true and F for false. Hand your quiz in when completed. However, the directions for an alternative assessment are not so cut and dry. They require an educator to do some serious work before the evaluation ever hits a student's desk. To give us a roadmap of sorts for this process, today's lesson will focus on writing clear directions for assessments. Narrowing our scope down a bit, we'll limit our discussion to alternative assessments. Since this is such a broad topic with lots of room for subjectivity, we'll stick to the basics.

For starters, the term **assessment** denotes the large array of tools educators use to assess and quantify student mastery of learning objectives. An **alternative assessment** is one in which students are asked to supply a response or show mastery of a task. Rather than just filling in multiple choice bubbles or writing T or F, students create their own responses to teacher prompts. Alternative assessments come in all shapes and sizes, from essay tests, to student portfolios, to classroom presentations. If it's used to assess and quantify student mastery and if students are required to supply a product or a response, it's counted as an alternative assessment.

### Validity

When writing clear directions for alternative assessments, the first step is to make sure these instructions are congruent with learning objectives. For example, if your objective is 'Students will be able to evaluate the impact of terrorism on U.S. foreign policy,' then your assessment's directions need to tell your students they are expected to write an evaluation. If your directions simply say, 'list instances of terrorism' or 'explain the reasons for terrorism,' then your directions are missing the mark. Simply asking students to list examples of terrorism or the reasons for terrorism will not allow you to assess whether or not students understand the impact of terrorism.

### Clear Expectations

After making sure your directions are congruent with learning objectives, the next task is to make sure they communicate clear expectations. In other words, directions should let students know exactly what is expected of them. Are they expected to simply list facts, or are they expected to interpret ideas? Are they required to express an opinion or simply regurgitate a memorized list? It is unfair to expect students to guess what you are looking for. Effectual educators clearly delineate their expectations through clearly written directions.

### Defined Criteria

Last for our discussion today, clear directions will include clearly defined criteria. Simply speaking, this is the practical stuff. If students are required to write an essay, how many words or pages are required? If they are required to give a speech, how long should it be? If they are expected to give a presentation, how many visual aids should be included? If your directions are clear, they will define acceptable formats and even due dates.